



Life Science

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY:

As you read, make inferences about the adaptations giant pandas need to survive.





Panda Mania!

By Lauri Berkenkamp

An extra long bone in the giant panda's wrist helps it to hold bamboo while it eats.



Snap! Crunch. Chomp, chomp, chomp. Deep in a forest, a giant panda is eating. Bamboo piles up in her lap.

She picks up another bamboo stem. She nibbles the green leaves. Finally, she bites the stem. The bamboo snaps. Inside the stem, the plant is soft. The panda smacks her lips as she chews.

Nearby, a golden pheasant scratches for food. Insects buzz. Monkeys chatter. The panda doesn't notice them at all. She focuses on eating.

This forest is in the mountains of China. It is a cool, rainy **habitat**. The rain doesn't bother the panda. She has thick, waterproof fur. It keeps her warm and dry. As rain pours down, she just keeps eating.

Eating a Lot to Get a Little Pandas are **omnivores**. An omnivore eats both meat and plants. A panda, however, mainly eats bamboo.

Bamboo is not very nutritious. So pandas must eat a lot of it to survive. It's a lot of work. Fortunately, pandas have **adaptations** that help.

They have a long bone in each wrist. It works like a thumb. Pandas can hold the stems to eat. Their sharp front teeth can bite through stems. Their flat back teeth crush bamboo.

A New Arrival


Evening falls. It's time to rest. A panda often sleeps right where it eats. Tonight is special, though.

Tonight, this panda needs to find a safe place. She is about to give birth to a cub. She finds a hollow tree. The tree is dry, warm, and dark.

In the morning, a small sound comes from her den. It's the cry of the panda cub. The cub is born with his eyes closed. He is pink and furless. He's as tiny as a stick of butter.



This panda mother gently carries her newborn baby in her mouth.



A panda mother and her cub explore the forest.

Getting Stronger

The baby panda is weak and helpless. His mother holds him close to keep him warm and safe.

Weeks go by. The cub grows fur. His eyes open. He grows bigger. It's time to leave the den for the first time.

The cub can't crawl very far. His mother has to carry him. She holds him in her teeth by the back of the neck. It doesn't hurt him, though.

The mother stops to eat. She holds her cub in one paw. She grabs bamboo with the other paw. Her cub watches. He's learning about bamboo.

Stepping Out

Months go by. The panda cub is almost a year old. He has grown a lot. Now he is almost the same size as his mother. He also eats about the same amount as she does.

During the day, the cub explores the forest. Sometimes at night, he stays by himself, too. He is learning how to live on his own.

The cub walks like other giant pandas. He walks on all four feet. His face is low to the ground. His legs are short. He walks slowly. Before long, he finds a new patch of bamboo. He sits down and pulls up a stem to chew.

Unexpected Guests

As the cub eats, two figures walk by. They look like really tall pandas. Yet they're not pandas. They're scientists wearing panda suits. They're looking for another cub.

The cub they're looking for had been born in a research center. When it was a little older, the cub was released to the wild. The scientists want to see how the cub is doing. They don't wish to bother this new cub. So they quietly back away.

A researcher dresses up like a giant panda. This disguise prevents the baby panda from getting used to humans.



As this baby panda grows, it will spend more time exploring on its own.



A Shrinking Refuge

Life for giant pandas may seem simple. Yet their lives can be hard. Nearly all giant pandas live in China's bamboo forest. Bamboo is normally plentiful here. However, it takes a long time for new plants to grow.

Sometimes, pandas eat all the bamboo in an area. Then they have to move to a new area to find more. This is becoming harder and harder to do.

Many people live in China. They need room to live and work. They build cities and farms.

This makes the forest **ecosystem** smaller. The giant pandas have less and less space. In time, they may become **extinct**.

Dwindling Numbers

Today, about 1,600 giant pandas live in the wild. More than 300 pandas live in zoos and research centers.

The Chinese government wants pandas to survive. It has formed panda reserves. People aren't allowed to hunt there. They can't cut trees or build new houses in the reserves.

About 4,000 kinds of plants and animals live here. All the living things in these ecosystems are connected. If one is endangered, the others are, too.

Unlocking the Secrets

There is still a lot to learn about giant pandas. So scientists built research centers. Here, scientists can study the pandas. They care for the pandas when they are sick.

Some cubs are born here, too.

Sometimes, a mother panda has twins. She will only take care of one cub. So scientists in the research center take care of the extra cub. They make sure the cub stays healthy.

The future of giant pandas is unclear. People are looking for ways to help pandas. Pandas need room to roam and food to eat. Protecting pandas will also help protect other species.

Wordwise

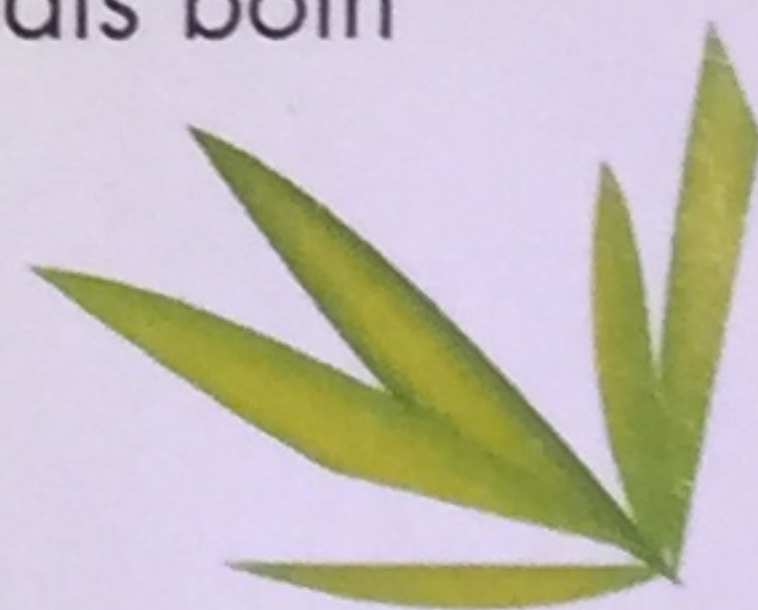
adaptation: a behavior or body part that helps an animal survive

ecosystem: all the living things and nonliving things in an area, and their interactions

extinct: no longer existing in living form

habitat: an environment where an animal lives

omnivore: an animal that eats both plants and animals



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This giant panda may spend more than 12 hours a day eating.